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VERNES'S 'SINAI AND KADESH'

Sinai contre Kadès. Les grands sanctuaires de l'Exode israélite et les routes du désert.¹ Par MAURICE VERNES. Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1915, gr. 8° (chez LEROUX, pp. 132).

AMERICA occupied the first place in a series of lectures delivered at the École pratique des Hautes-Études of the Sorbonne, which have just appeared in the *Annual* for the scholastic year 1915-16, published in the section dealing with the science of religions. Professor J. Raynaud, who holds the chair of Religions of America before Columbus, devoted one of his weekly lectures to the Civil and Religious History of Central America preceding Columbus, chiefly according to native documents; in the second course he will decipher the hieratic and hieroglyphic writings of the same region. Maurice Vernes is at present studying the origins of the religion of Israel, and investigating the latest hypothesis on this subject; in the second course he will give a philological exegesis of Canticles.—Rabbi Israël Lévi, Professor of Talmudic and Rabbinic Judaism, is now expounding the rabbinic commentaries on the Psalms and the *Sefer ha Yashar*. Passing over the other courses on the history of religions, which do not form part of the present group, it will suffice to note that six of the courses, the professors of which are with the colours, cannot be given because of the war. For the same reason many of the Jewish publications have been compelled to suspend.

In the work to which this notice is devoted the learned director of studies on the religions of Israel and the western Semites, president of the section on religious sciences, gives a long archaeological and geographical study, with a plea for the ancient Sinai against her young and brilliant rival, Kadesh, in the

¹ The map attached by the author is of great importance.

extreme south of the land of Canaan. This portion merits special attention all the more, because the author usually denies the antiquity of the Biblical books,² while here he clearly takes a view in favour of tradition.

In the first place it is well to examine the Sinaitic peninsula, in particular its situation on the line of transit between Egypt and Palestine, before attempting even mentally to traverse the peninsula from west to east. We must choose one of the two following routes—either the northern, which goes north-east along the coast of the Mediterranean, or the southern, which, entering the wilderness of Sinai, passes to the south along the shore of the Red Sea, then leaves on the north the desert of Paran, to-day called *El-Tih*, the desert of the wandering. In the presence of this inevitable dilemma, one must make a decision to go by one route or the other. We get a good idea of it from the map of Sinai briefly sketched from the book of M. Vernes (p. 3): it leads from Mts. Serbal and Sinai, bounded on the south by the Red Sea, up to the Mediterranean on the north, including Jerusalem in the north-east. It indicates, in approximately large features, the position of the routes suitable for communication between Egypt and Asia at the time of Moses.

The most recent critics reject the traditional location; some of them accept the imaginary position attributed by Christian monks of the fourth century of the common era, because they claim as the scene of the giving of the Decalogue the site of the convent erected in honour of St. Catherine, whose church was built at the foot of Djebel Musa (Mountain of Moses). Among the contemporary historians who have treated this question of the exodus of Israel in the desert the youngest is an officer, Raymond Weill, captain in the Engineers, whose competency is not doubted, but whose theories will bear discussion.³

² This opinion is set forth positively in other works by this author, *Précis d'histoire juive* (1889), *Résultats de l'exégèse biblique* (1890), *Essais bibliques* (1892), and many other works.

³ He has dealt with this subject several times: first in the thesis which he upheld with great success before the Faculté des Lettres of Paris under

According to M. Weill great stress must be laid upon the fact that the identification of Sinai with the point of the peninsula which has taken and kept the name Sinaitic coincides with the arrival of the monks, and had never occurred to any reader of the Bible. Nevertheless M. Weill falls in with that view—what a paradox!

Renan, in spite of all his scepticism, was not so revolutionary. He held, at least in most points, to the Mosaic tradition as regards the principal stations during the exodus; without rejecting the terms of the Pentateuch he believed in the essential rôle that Sinai plays in the journeyings of the Hebrews in the desert. 'Of all these stories concerning the exodus', he says,⁴ 'it is possible that the error was made in preserving merely the fact itself of the departure from Egypt and the entrance into the peninsula of Sinai. . . . By continuing its route directly toward the south, Israel would have found only death. It turned towards the south-east, almost following the sea, or rather the ancient route which the Egyptians had traced in order to exploit the copper mines of Sinai.' The writer adds further: 'The criticism which considers as legendary all these stories relative to Horeb and Sinai, can hardly attach any value to the topographical researches that have been made to localize the Biblical scene'.

After pointing out this opinion, which follows that of Eduard Reuss, M. Vernes presents in turn (pp. 10-16) the adverse opinions proposed by J. Wellhausen in the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, by A. von Gall in his *Israelitische Kulturstätten* (Giessen, 1898), by Hermann Guthe, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Tübingen, 1914). All their arguments notwithstanding, it is unnecessary to renounce the view adopted up to the present. The duality of routes which led from the land of Canaan to

the title 'La Presqu'île du Sinaï: Étude de géographie et d'histoire (Paris, 1908), then in a very well-developed paper which the *Revue des Études Juives* published (1909), LVII, 19-54, 194-238; LVIII, 23-59. Cf. *Journal Asiatique*, 1909, I, 295-300.

⁴ *Histoire du peuple d'Israël*, t. I (1887), pp. 161, 165, 195, note 1; cf. t. II, p. 36.

Egypt is not doubtful. We do not know, it is true, what course was followed in this direction by each of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but the famous text of Exodus (13. 17-18) is explicit; it furnishes the reason why Israel, led by Moses, left Egypt by the road of the desert along the coast of the Red Sea in preference to the road on the north, although the latter was the shorter and more practical of the two. The people must not change their minds, says the Bible, on seeing war and return to Egypt; that is why God made the people take a round-about way by the route of the desert of the sea of Sûf (Red Sea) or sea of rushes. Let us lay stress upon a single one of the arguments presented by our author in favour of his thesis; it is an argument upon the reading of a word which at first seems insignificant, but which upon consideration becomes weighty and of force.

A longitudinal plan which accompanies the work of our author contains the places in dispute.⁵ It is an extract of the *Table romaine* of Peutinger, edited by T. Ernest Desjardins (1872, in-folio), which has been reduced to about two-thirds. It is a question of determining an intermediate point between the ancient Klysma—to-day Suez—and Paran in order to proceed by the south to Kadesh, in accordance with the geography of Ptolemy. The latter mentions Munychiatis, which was sought in vain upon the aforesaid Table. On this map one mutilated word, with an initial syllable cut off, had been erroneously read *deia*, and then completed to read [*Me*]*deia*, so as to meet the requirements of the opposite thesis; while M. Vernes, adopting the reading *ocia*, completes it as [*Men*]*ocia* = *Munychiatis*, because he bases his argument upon the actual name Makuan, in the south, as it is represented upon the map of M. Georges Bénédict in the *Guide Joanne*, 'Syrie et Palestine' (Paris, 1891, 12°); but we know that the original of the Table of Peutinger is preserved at the Imperial Library of Vienna, and it is fortunate that, in spite of the obstacles in communication at the present

⁵ 'Name of an Arabic locality of Sinai', according to M. Clément Huart.

time, our author has obtained the verification of the word in doubt, thanks to the plenipotentiary minister of the Swiss Confederation at Paris, who mediated with the Swiss Embassy at Vienna, and was able to ascertain that the geographical name in question is written as it was formerly recognized and published. It results from this identification that the Romans also followed the south of the peninsula or the Red Sea, not the north or the Mediterranean, in order to go to Asia.

We shall not follow any further our exegete in his comparative study of the days of the route as they have been indicated in the Pentateuch, particularly in Numbers. It would likewise take too long to discuss his opinion, which is expressed (p. 89) as follows : 'The Israelites, from the time that they were settled in Canaan, never had occasion to introduce Sinai in the circle of their religious thought ; Sinai always survived in their minds'. Let us, therefore, adhere to this conclusion of the author : 'Sinai-Horeb is lost in the mist, but it is at the same time glorified with an incomparable splendour. What it has lost in historical exactness it has regained in the opulence of the teachings which are attached to it—the wonderful Decalogue. Restored by the most rigid criticism, though shaken for a moment at its foundation, the mountain of Moses rests upon one of the highest summits upon which humanity fastens its eyes'.

MOÏSE SCHWAB.

Paris, National Library.